THE RECEPTION OF CALVINISTIC THOUGHT IN ENGLAND

BY

CHARLES DAVIS CREMEANS

B. A., College of Wooster, 1936
M. A., University of Illinois, 1940

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
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It is the object of this thesis to trace the transfer of the ideas of John Calvin from their birthplace in Geneva to England and to study the effect of this change of environment upon the Calvinistic system of thought.

The possible usefulness of such a study was indicated by the fact that although historians have paid extensive attention to the history of the various religious groups in sixteenth century England, the general agreement of all English Protestants in favor of Calvinistic theology has not been sufficiently emphasized. Neither has the early growth and establishment of the native English Calvinistic system of thought been traced in any detail heretofore.

Furthermore, it has seemed to the author that the transfer of Calvinism from Geneva to England offers a remarkable subject for a case study on the role of ideas in history. Here the historian has an opportunity to show the mutability of ideas, to show how they are adapted to fit the purposes of the men who hold them, and to point out the great difference between the logical and the practical consequences of an idea. As a result of this interest, the author has concentrated his main attention upon the development of Calvinism and not on the history of Puritanism or Anglicanism. He has made the Calvinistic system of thought the main actor in his piece and has emphasized the reaction of Calvinism to the religious, political, and social atmosphere of England and its growth into something distinctively English.

The printed source materials for the study of early English Calvinism are numerous and easily available in America. There are the publications of the Calvin Translation Society which include English translations of the complete works of Calvin.[1] Calvin's correspondence has been compiled in four volumes by Jules Bonnet and translated into English.[2] The writings of many

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[1] Published at Edinburgh, 1844-59.

[2] Jules Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin,* translated by Constable and Gilchrist, vols. I & II, Edinburgh, 1860-62, vols. III & IV, Philadelphia, 1858.

of the leaders of the early Anglican Church have been published by the Parker Society at Cambridge, England, during the middle nineteenth century. Among the Parker Society publications of particular importance to the study of early Calvinism are the volumes entitled *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation*[3] and the *Zurich Letters*.[4] Numerous original sixteenth century printed volumes are also available in some American libraries in addition to many modern reprints of valuable works, such as *The Works of John Knox*,[5] and also facsimiles like Christopher Goodman's *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed*.[6]

Among the many valuable secondary works are the writings and compilations of John Strype which contain extracts from numerous original documents which are no longer in existence.[7] Other secondary works to which frequent reference has been made are too many to be enumerated here, though mention should be made of the scholarly works of F. S. Scott Pearson: *Thomas Cartwright and Elizabethan Puritanism*[8] and *Church and State*.[9]

The problem of this thesis has been approached by, first, analyzing the contents of Calvin's thought and then studying its implications, particularly those implications which were brought out by Calvin's career as practical head of the Genevan Church and State. This done, the body of the thesis contains a study of the actual transfer of Calvinism to England and a discussion of the English Calvinism which was developed to meet the needs of the English Nonconformists.

Calvin's system of thought was admirably adapted to the needs of the sixteenth century. Its theology was a sound development of the strongest features of preceeding Protestant theology with certain significant new emphases. Yet Calvinism was more than a theological system for it had many secular

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3 2 vols., Cambridge, 1846-7.
4 2 vols., Cambridge, 1842-45.
5 David Laing, ed., 6 vols., Edinburgh, 1846-55.
6 Facsimilie Text Society, New York, 1931.
7 *Works of Strype*, Oxford, 1812-22.
8 London, 1925.
9 Cambridge, 1928.

implications. The Calvinist emphasis on order and discipline implied strictly regulated church and state governments. Calvin's conception of the obligation of the civil magistrate to serve the church implied a close cooperation of church and state. The Calvinist conception of law and the practice of church government by elected officials anticipated and promoted the development of a more liberal and flexible governmental system. On the question of the right of misgoverned subjects to rebel, however, Calvin's ideas were only half-formed and allowed room for various interpretations of his meaning.

The heritage of thought and example which Calvin left to his followers was fairly definite, on the whole. Nevertheless, there was considerable variation in the thought of the great Genevan's followers—even among his immediate followers. This variation depended upon the environment into which Calvin's ideas were taken. The development of Calvinism in Scotland is an excellent example of the sensitiveness of abstract ideas to political and social environment. The Scots had long accepted the justice of tyrannicide. They applied the doctrine by attacking their regent, Mary of Lorraine, at the very time Knox introduced Calvinism into the country. It was natural, therefore, that Scottish Calvinism should include a belief in the righteousness of forceful opposition to ungodly rulers. Furthermore, the close relations between English and Scottish Protestants, which had been established principally through the agency of Knox, permitted the exertion of considerable Calvinistic influence upon England from Scotland. It is of great significance, however, that though a large body of English Calvinists had close relations with the Scottish Church, their acceptance of Calvinism was modified by the situation in which they found themselves in England, not by the changes which the Scots had made in Calvinism. Consequently, English Calvinism was no more an imitation of Scottish Calvinism than Scottish Calvinism was an exact copy of Genevan Calvinism.

The transfer of Calvinistic thought to England was effected by several factors in addition to the influence of the Scottish example. The personal prestige of Calvin as the leader of the Reformed Churches on the continent gave him a hearing by the greatest men in England during the reign of Edward VI.

The Marian Exile placed a group of English Protestants in direct personal contact with Calvin and the Genevan Church and State. The English congregation in Geneva became one of the most important sources of Calvinistic influence in England.

The death of Mary and the accession of Elizabeth to the English throne permitted the return of most of the exiled Protestants to England. Though the new Queen was not herself sympathetic toward Calvinists, she was in a position where she had to tolerate them. Then there were certain factors which promoted the spread of Calvinistic ideas within England. Congregations of exiled French and Dutch Calvinists settled in England and carried on a vigorous church life which served to keep the Calvinist system before the eyes of Englishmen. Many of the most important offices of the English Church were held by Calvinists who were too prominent to be disregarded by a church which needed every bit of ecclesiastical talent it could find. Elizabeth's personal antagonism to Calvinism was not shared by many of the members of her Privy Council and occupants of other high offices in the state. Some of these nobles gave considerable support to the Calvinists. The book trade also played an important part in the spread of Calvinism. The writings of Calvin and Beza were printed and reprinted in England and became available to everyone interested.[10]

The establishment of the official Church of England by Queen Elizabeth produced the situation in which English Calvinism grew into a full-fledged system of thought. Elizabeth's requirement of the Oath of Supremacy and her attempts to establish religious uniformity under the State Church produced a split in the ranks of English Protestants, some choosing to conform and others attempting to develop a church which was more to their liking than they found in the Church of England. In view of this division of English Protestantism, the nearly universal acceptance of Calvinistic theology in England during the reign of Elizabeth is remarkable. Since the social and political position of the Conformists and Nonconformists differed so greatly, however, the type of Calvinism developed in each group dif-

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[10] *Cf.* A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue*, London, 1926, *passim.*

fered. The Conformists bartered away their right to any other opinions on the government of the church and state than those which were officially prescribed for them. Consequently, the scope of their Calvinism did not extend much beyond the realm of theology.

John Whitgift, arch Conformist though he was, owed a heavy debt to the thought of John Calvin, for his theology relied more on the authority of Calvin than on that of any other theologian.[11] Such orthodox embodiments of Anglican theology as Nowell's *Catechism*[12] and Rogers' *Catholic Doctrine*[13] reveal that the reputation of Calvin as a theologian stood higher in Anglican circles than that of any other Protestant divine.

A compromise between Calvinism and Conformity that was attempted by many Englishmen is illustrated by the life and work of Edmund Grindal, who was successively Bishop of London, Archbishop of York, and Archbishop of Canterbury. His acceptance of official responsibility in the Church of England did not conceal his approval of the Calvinist ideal of an independent and responsible ministry,[14] or prevent his sympathetic supervision of the foreign congregations of Calvinists in London.[15]

The position of the Nonconformists differed from that of the Conformists. They had made no previous commitments, except to their religion. Nevertheless, the Nonconformists were not free to, nor did they conceive the possibility of reproducing the Genevan system in England without changes. They accepted Calvin's thought and Calvin's system of church and state government wholeheartedly, but, like all men, they paid considerable attention to the possibilities and necessities of the immediate situation in which they found themselves. Consequently, though the Nonconformists developed Calvinism in all its aspects, their Calvinism differed as much from the original system of the Genevan Reformer as did Scottish, Dutch, or French Calvinism.

A factor of great importance in the formation of the system

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11 *Works of Whitgift*, 3 vols., Parker Society, Cambridge, 1851-53, *passim.*
12 Parker Society, Cambridge, 1853.
13 Parker Society, Cambridge, 1854.
14 Grindal, *Remains*, Parker Society, Cambridge, 1843, p. 389.
15 de Schickler, *Eglises de Langue Francaise*, I, Paris, 1892, pp. 85-6.

of thought accepted by the Nonconforming Calvinists of England was Elizabeth's at least nominal Protestantism and the favor shown to Calvinism by officials and other men of importance in the English State. The English Calvinists were convinced that it was more feasible to plan to take advantage of the comparative freedom and support which they had than to risk the chances of revolution, being in a minority as they were.[16]

The distinctive development of English Calvinism began about 1570 when the group of Nonconformists represented by Thomas Cartwright and Walter Travers began to emphasize the Calvinistic discipline and system of church government. Their adaptation of the Calvinistic discipline was formulated in Travers' book, *The Ecclesiasticall Discipline.*[17] This work is faithfully modeled on Calvin's Geneva system. The really new elements added to the original system did not change the nature of the system itself but consisted of a method which the Nonconformists devised for establishing it in England. This plan was devised to meet the English situation at the time. It differed from anything thought of or used by Calvin, or by the Scottish, French, or Dutch Calvinists. The Nonconformists felt that they did not need to overthrow the Church of England, but could simply introduce their discipline into the already existing structure. This was to be accomplished by gaining the support of sympathetic officials of the church who, with the assent of those officials of the state favorable to Calvinism, would introduce the discipline into the Church of England. A complete Calvinistic reformation would, of course, require numerous changes in the ministry, the episcopal system, church ceremonies, et cetera, but all these changes were thought to be within the realm of possibility without violence or illegal action.[18]

The fact that the Calvinistic Nonconformists were able to conceive a plan of action which did not contemplate revolt against civil authority tended to make their political philosophy correspond more closely to Calvin's than that of Calvinistic groups in other countries.

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[16] R. G. Usher, *The Presbyterian Movement*, London, 1905, pp. xviii-xix.
[17] Translated by Thomas Cartwright, London, 1574.
[18] Usher, *op. cit.*

Other political implications of English Calvinism which became of significance were the Calvinist concept of law, which facilitated the development of the idea of equity in law, and the Calvinist system of church government by elected representatives, which may have had some influence on a later development of a feeling of responsibility for political affairs by private persons of the middle classes.

The Nonconforming Calvinists developed the first complete system of English Calvinism. Their system was full of indications of their loyal regard for Calvin as a thinker and doer, but, though it contained no repudiations of basic Calvinistic ideas, it represented a development of original Calvinism to meet English needs. English Calvinism differed from other Calvinistic systems, essentially, in its expanded and perfected system of local church government, a development made necessary in England by the fact that the Calvinist congregations in that country were practically independent of higher control or oversight. The functions and duties of ministers were clarified and emphasized, because English Calvinism depended entirely on its ministers for leadership and direction. English Calvinists developed the use of the so-called prophesyings to a high degree because of the need they felt for the stimulation and educational value of these intellectual and theological contests, things not generally provided them in the universities or other public places. Finally, English Calvinism developed the concept of the benevolent Christian magistrate who would admit and protect the church's right to a certain amount of independence in spiritual affairs because of its special connection with God.

This, the first truly English Calvinistic system of thought, was completed by Thomas Cartwright, Walter Travers, and their associates about the year 1580. As this system of thought was the greatest achievement of the early English Calvinists, and as later Calvinistic thought in England derived from it rather than from foreign sources, we have in it the culmination of the process of reception and adaptation which is the subject of this thesis. We have traced the full transformation of Calvinism from its Genevan form to its English form. After 1580 Calvinistic thought played its part in English history as an established part of English thought.

VITA

Charles Davis Cremeans was born at Morrison, Illinois August 11, 1915. He attended the elementary and secondary schools of Springfield, Illinois, graduating from Springfield High School in 1932. In September of that year he entered the College of Wooster. While at Wooster Mr. Cremeans' main scholastic interests were in philosophy, history, and English literature. He graduated with a B.A. degree in 1936 and received the Miller Prize in Philosophy.

In 1936 he went to the American College in Assiut, Egypt, where he was a member of the English Department for three years. Mr. Cremeans traveled in Europe and the Near East every summer between 1936 and 1939, inclusive. He was a student at the Alliançe Française in Paris in the summer of 1937 and at the University of Freiburg, Germany in the summer of 1938.

After returning to the United States in 1939 Mr. Cremeans entered the Graduate School of the University of Illinois and began advanced work in history. He received the M.A. degree in history in 1940 and continued work toward the Ph.D. degree. Mr. Cremeans taught American and European history as an assistant in the University of Illinois Department of History during the academic years of 1940-41 and 1941-42. He taught a course in Ancient history in the University of Illinois Summer Session in 1942.